Hadassah Becker

Getting Ready for Shabbos Preparing for Moshiach

A search for redeeming spiritual values in the frantic Friday rush.

THE UNFINISHED PRELUDE

Much has been spoken and written through the ages about the joy and fulfillment the Jewish Woman experiences through her *Shabbos* preparations. Countless poems have described that hushed exalted moment when, dressed in her *Shabbos* finery, her house in gleaming order, her proud husband and glowing children gathered around her, she steps forward to light the candles and welcome the *Shabbos* to her home.

How remote that picture sometimes seems—a romanticized image, a beautiful dream that has slipped beyond our grasp. How much closer to reality seems the often humorously exaggerated cliche of *The Erev Shabbos Rush*—of the frantic housewife brandishing her pots and brooms, rushing and huffing and puffing as the deadline looms before her bleary eyes. Indeed, in varying degrees, *Erev Shabbos* can often be a harried time of frazzled nerves and short tempers, when the house seems to echo with shouted commands and accusations, when everything seems to go wrong, schedules go awry and no matter how hard you work, little seems to be getting done.

This can be attributed in part to the simple difficulty of meeting a deadline. The very nature of housework is that nothing ever seems to be completed with much finality. The remains of one meal are scarcely cleared away when you must begin to prepare for the next one. Sticky fingerprints reappear as if by magic, moments after they are wiped away. Cups and saucers pile up in the sink almost as fast as they can be washed and put away. And the

Mrs. Becker, a teacher in a Bais Yaakov High School in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, expresses gratitude to her husband for some of the sources of this article. Her "When the Call Was Issued" was featured in the Feb. 86 JO.

How ironic if one lights the Shabbos candles, symbols of Shalom Bayis, in an atmosphere of tension and unhappiness!

bottom of the laundry hamper is a rare sight indeed! Since one can't do everything at once, at almost any given moment there is something which is untidy, undone, and for every task completed there are often two waiting. Count in the usual amount of miscellaneous interruptions, emergencies and the normal hustle and bustle of the average household and you can begin to understand why the Torah exempted women from most time-bound *mitzvos*. You can also understand why the tension that can come from the simple necessity of preparing for *Shabbos*, and having everything ready on time, should not be underestimated.

This is not a twentieth century problem. The *Gemora* in *Shabbos* cautions men not to leave their home for *shul* on Friday night until they have witnessed that their wives have lit candles at the proper time, "for women are lax in doing so." It is also stated that one should verbally ask his wife whether she has separated *challa* (because this cannot be done on *Shabbos*). He should also verbally remind the members of his household to light candles. However, *Chazal* caution that one must do this gently, and speak with soft words.

While our *chachamim* understood well the need for this reminder, they also understood how it can lead to bitterness and wounded feelings. A woman who is behind in her work on *Erev Shabbos* is working under great pressure. Her feelings of failure combined with any expressed or implied (or imagined) reproach from her spouse, can create a state of extreme tension where any irritation is greatly magnified. In this state, even a simple reminder of her need to complete a given task may lead to tears or an explosion of tempers.

Indeed, it is on *Erev Shabbos*, more than at any other time, that *Shalom Bayis* (domestic harmony) is vulnerable. We can reach a deeper understanding of this potential for difficulty in our preparations for *Shabbos*, by examining the nature of these preparations.

PREPARING—AN END UNTO ITSELF

While the preparations for any *mitzva* has great importance, the preparations for *Shabbos* have a special uniqueness, and our *seforim* abound with descriptions of their loftiness. The late Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner זצ"ל offers a special insight into this loftiness in his monumental work, *Pachad Yitzchok: Chazal* tell us that *Shabbos* is *me'ein Olam Habba*—a lesson, a taste, a glimpse and a microcosm of the World-to-Come in all its aspects. One fundamental aspect of *Olam Habba* is the requirement that we long for it. We are to seek redemption, hope for it, pray for it, and try with all our strength to bring about the Messianic Era, which is so much more similar to *Olam Habba* in its spirituality than is our current state of affairs. This anticipation and preparation for redemption is a crucial part of redemption itself.

Rabbi Hutner explains that just as *Shabbos* is a microcosm of *Olam Habba*, our preparation for *Shabbos* is a microcosm of "anticipating the Redemption." This casts our preparations for *Shabbos* in an entirely new light. They are not merely a means to an end, they constitute an end in themselves. The dishes that we prepare on *Erev Shabbos* are important not only because we will enjoy them on *Shabbos*. They have an importance in and of themselves, for they are a concrete expression of our longing for *Olam Habba*. The feelings that go into the preparation and the aura that is created by them have a unique significance. For creating an atmosphere of anticipation for *Shabbos* is a goal, no less important, no less deserving of thought and planning, then the completion of the physical tasks involved.

RECEIVING THE QUEEN

And if the preparations for *Shabbos* are so fraught with significance, the moment of greeting her and of welcoming her presence has a special sanctity. A special emphasis has always been placed upon *Kabbolas Shabbos*, receiving the *Shabbos*. Not content to sit and wait for her, Rabbi Chaninah would wrap himself in his cloak and say: "Come, let us go and greet the *Shabbos* Queen." Rabbi Yannai would don his garment and say "Enter O bride! Enter O bride!" The 16th Century *mekubalim* (Cabbalists) of Tzfas dressed in white garments and went out to greet the *Shabbos* queen, to receive her with songs of praise. And we, too, recite some of those same words of greeting and praise in *"Lecha Dodi."*

How often do we catapult into *Shabbos*, out of breath, *tichels* askew, shouting last minute instructions and reminders. *Shabbos* has arrived, but have we received her? One noted *Mechaneches* (educator) spoke recently about the frequency with which the members of the household are busy brushing their hats and polishing their shoes even after the women have lit the candles. "The *Shabbos* queen has come," she said, "and you are telling her to wait in the hall while you polish your shoes."

Yet, even if we are not always perfectly ready, it is undeniable that the moment of lighting candles is one of an almost palpable descent of *kedusha*. In the words of a sensitive young *ba'alas teshuva*, "The first time I saw someone lighting candles was an unbelievable moment. I felt"—and she made a fluttering gesture with her hands—"I could feel the *Shechina* coming down."

And this is the heart of the matter. There is an axiom זה לעומת זה עשה האלוקים (קהלת ז') that G-d has created opposing forces in the world. Wherever a powerful potential

for *kedusha* exists, an equally powerful force opposes its realization. It is precisely because of the great sanctity of preparing for *Shabbos* and receiving her, that there exists an increased potential for discord. When we prepare to receive the gift of *Shabbos*, the harmony of our homes is threatened so that we will not merit to experience the true tranquility of *Shabbos*.

How ironic if one lights the *Shabbos* candles, which are a symbol of *Shalom Bayis*—indeed the Sages mandated them for reasons of *Shalom Bayis*—in an atmosphere of tension and unhappiness. And how unfortunate if this *eis ratzon*, this special opportunity for a woman to place her requests before Him, is not utilized because of haste, confusion, or exhaustion.

A NIGHT FOR THE ANGELS

Two angels—one good, one evil—escort a person home from the synagogue on Friday night. If he arrives home and finds the candles lit, a set table and a made bed, the good angel says: "May it be G-d's will that it also be so next Shabbos." *The evil angel is compelled to answer* "Amen."

Why is it that on Friday night—more so than at any other time—we merit to have angels accompany us. The *Maharal* explains that *Shabbos* itself so elevates us, and brings us so much closer to perfection that we are worthy of being visited and escorted by angels. But it is not automatically assumed that they will find order and harmony in every home.

But if he does not find everything in order, then the evil angel says: "May it be G-d's will that it also be so next Sabbath." The good angel is compelled to answer "Amen."

Catapulted through the afternoon, we find that Shabbos has arrived. But have we received her?

In the performance of any *mitzva* there is the possibility of failure. Why is it that in regard to Friday night the possibility of not being ready is so explicitly expressed, so openly anticipated? Why is it so strongly voiced?

The very loftiness of the potential to merit the blessing of angels *must* cause the possibility of failure to be so real. The very greatness of this opportunity promotes a counter force of unusual power aimed at preventing us from reaching its height.

And powerful it is indeed. How often does our very appreciation of the *Shabbos* itself and our desire to honor her properly turn against us and prevent its true attainment. Rabbi Avrohom Pam שליט"א often presents

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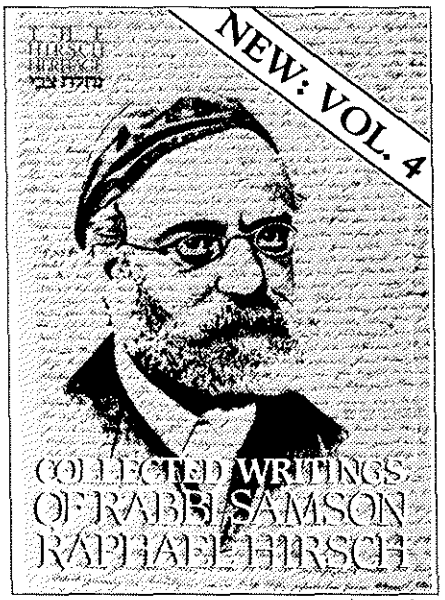

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"Erev Shabbos—when anticipation, not readiness, is the goal." —*Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner* זצ"ל

his students with the following scenario: It is close to *Shabbos*. A *bachur* is busy brushing his hat or polishing his shoes. His mother calls from the kitchen with a request for assistance. "I can't," he replies (in annoyance), "I'm getting ready for *Shabbos*." The young fellow thinks that he is occupied with a *mitzva*, but in truth, he has trampled upon a basic precept of the Torah for something that, important as it may be, is only a *hiddur*—an embellishment.

We can certainly appreciate this example from the mother's point of view, but how often are we the ones who, in our desire to prepare for *Shabbos* with perfection, ignore the rudiments of *bein adam le'chaveiro*, (interpersonal commands)? How often in pushing ourselves to capacity and beyond, to scrub and polish for *Shabbos*, do we let out our tension on those around us? If so, we are preparing our homes for *Shabbos*, but not our hearts. We are preparing an external welcome, while banishing her spirit from our midst.

The Chofetz Chaim refused to let his wife wash the floors of their simple dwelling, for fear that the many people who came to their door would be afraid to step on a freshly washed floor with their muddy shoes. He even reprimanded his daughter for scrubbing the floor on *Erev Shabbos*, telling her to to "polish her *neshama* instead," in honor of the *Shabbos*. Certainly when we work on Friday to make our homes sparkle, it should not be at the expense of another person's feelings. For when in the process of causing a house to shine, the glow of *Shalom Bayis* is diminished even slightly, then a family was prevented from attaining the full joy of *kabbolas Shabbos*.

This is not to minimize the importance of our physical preparations themselves. Each dish prepared, each vessel polished, in honor of the *Shabbos* has *kedusha*. We are told that the preparation of a person exerting himself for *Shabbos* has a power similar to that of tears in erasing transgressions. If we would but realize the true significance of each act we do in honor of *Shabbos*, perhaps we would find even more to do!

IMPLICATIONS OF AN EARLY START

Planning and preparing ahead is one obvious way to make our *Shabbos* preparations proceed more smoothly. The *Shulchan Aruch* tells us to rise early Friday morning to prepare for *Shabbos*, just as our ancestors rose early to collect and prepare the double portion of *manna*. It is considered a *hiddur* to prepare and purchase things on Friday itself.

This does not mean that you must leave everything for Friday. The *Shulchan Aruch* does state that food requiring extensive preparation should be purchased and prepared earlier. Many preliminary preparations can be made, even for things that we will do on Friday itself. Leaving everything for one day tends to result in overwork and fatigue, rendering one vulnerable and susceptible to last minute rushing and *Shalom Bayis* tensions. Certainly, starting early is essential for working women and mothers of young children, especially on short Fridays.

This is not just a practical suggestion to facilitate our readiness for *Shabbos*. Only if we organize ourselves so that we are not working under pressure can we taste the joy and sweetness of preparing for *Shabbos*. Only then can we have the peace of mind to feel happiness and satisfaction in what we are doing. And only then can we communicate these feelings to our families, and create an atmosphere of anticipation and expectation in our homes.

To a young child, *Erev Shabbos* can be a day of tantalizing sights and sounds. His eyes watch in wonder as his mother cuts, chops, grates, peels and whisks various ingredients into and out of the stove. He tags after her in fascination as she dusts, sprays, scrubs and polishes in honor of the *Shabbos*. If his mother takes the time to show him and comment on what she is doing, and even lets him help a bit, his excitement knows no bounds.

Older children, too, can gain a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from participating in *Shabbos* preparations. There is no guaranteed formula for motivating them to help, but the spirit in which the request is made has a great impact on the attitude with which their assistance is offered.

"I remember bickering with my sisters about the chore of setting the table for Shabbos *" said a young mother, "but now that I have a home of my own, I get such satisfaction from placing each object on the table and watching the room become transformed. My children are still very young, but I would like to imbue them with that feeling. Even now, I let them place the* becher *on the table, but I try to present it as a privilege, not a chore."*

FRUSTRATING FRAGILE FRIDAYS

But what about those Fridays when, despite our worthy ambitions, despite our careful planning, everything seems to fall apart? What can be done once we have already fallen hopelessly behind schedule, the *kugel* has burnt, the children are bickering, and our reserves of patience have been long depleted? What about those afternoons when we can't complete our basic tasks, never mind imbue our households with *Erev Shabbos* excitement? What happens to our beautiful ideals then?

A mother of a large family became increasingly frustrated at the Erev Shabbos *scene in her house. Somehow her tablecloths never came out snowy white, her cakes were never fluffy, her candlesticks never shone the way her neighbors' did and her floors just refused to clean.*

The more she struggled for that orderly Erev Shabbos *perfection, the more messy and out-of-control things seemed to get, and the more tense she became. This resulted in a vicious cycle of tensions and frustration.*

Finally she consulted a Rav. *"You have a problem of* bitachon," *she was told.*

"Bitachon? *What does that have to do with preparing for* Shabbos?" *she asked in surprise.*

"Much of your tension stems from the fact that you are comparing yourself to others, and berating yourself for not living up to their standards," said the Rav. *"Self-acceptance is an important factor in* bitachon. *G-d created each person with his own unique nature and abilities. He did not create you with the nature to be a* Super-Balabusta. *Accept this fact. Work with the abilities that* Hashem *has given you and rejoice in them!"*

Often, it is the very nature of our high aspirations that causes us to fail, especially, if they are unrealistically based on other peoples' standards that are not commensurate with our own abilities. Setting up an image of the "Perfect *Erev Shabbos*" in our minds can be counterproductive if we become frustrated by our failure to live up to this ideal. Because we are human, we will inevitably fall short of perfection. Does that mean that we cannot dream of *Erev Shabbos* tranquility? Is it futile, then, for us to strive for lofty goals?

Not at all. Ironic as it may seem, the realization that we will inevitably fall short of our goals is the first step towards reaching those goals. To the degree that we accept our limitations and human frailties, we will not be demoralized and frustrated by our failures, but we will be able to learn and grow through them.

Our desire for *Erev Shabbos* tranquility must also be tempered with the understanding that success or failure is measured not merely in the tangible results of our efforts.

In *Shomayim*, our intentions and feelings are the crucial measure, not only the physical perfection of our results. If we struggled to remain calm in the face of repeated mishaps—isn't that success? If we lost our tempers, but managed to apologize and regain control—is that not a triumph? If our floors did not receive that gleaming finish, but we did our best—can we say that we have failed?

"והיה ביום השישי, והכינו את אשר יביאו." We are told that on the sixth day of the week, our ancestors brought home their portion of *manna*, and prepared it for *Shabbos*. The והיה expression "and it was" always denotes joy. The *Chidushei HaRim* explains that the use of the expression והיה in this context is to teach us that feeling joy upon the advent of *Shabbos* is the ultimate preparation for *Shabbos*. Let us not forget this as we go about our *Erev Shabbos* tasks. As the hustle and bustle and hum and clatter of *Shabbos* preparations fill our home, let us remember what Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל has taught us—

"Anticipation, not readiness, is the crucial goal."■

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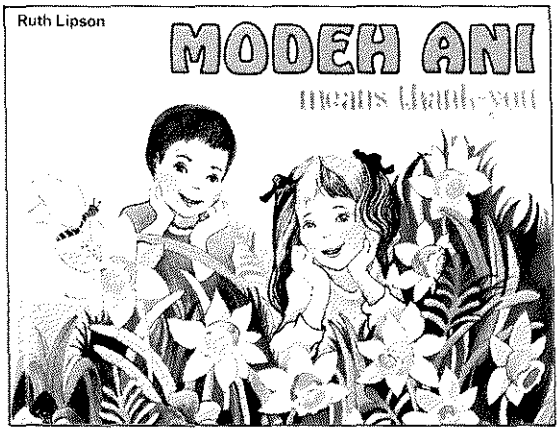

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